GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:89
ANSWERED ON:08.12.2003
BAN ON UNE AND IMPORT OF MERCURY
MAHBOOB ZAHEDI;SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the mercury pollution is spreading and the country is becoming a dumping ground;

(b) if so, whether developed countries have imposed ban on use of mercury whereas India is importing and using mercury on a large scale;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor;

(d) whether the Government is aware of the findings of Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in this regard;

(e) if so, the details thereof;

(f) whether the emissions from mercury could cause damage to the human body such as memory loss, impaired coordination, vision disturbance and cardio vascular problems;

(g) if so, whether the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) is finding a way to phase out mercury; and

(h) if so, the details thereof and the remedial steps taken or being taken by the Government in this regard ?

Answer

MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU)

(a) to (h) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PART(S) (A) TO (H) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 89 TO ANSWEREDON 8.12.2003 REGARDING BAN ON UNE AND IMPORT OF MERCURY BY SHRI MAHBOOB ZAHEDI & SULTAN SALAHUDDIN OWAISI.

(a) : There is no such scientific study/finding to suggest that mercury pollution is spreading and the country is becoming a dumping ground.

(b) & (c) : In developed countries including countries within Organization of Economic Cooperation andDevelopment (OECD) and European Community, legislations have been made to only ban or limit the use of identified products containing mercury. Mercury is imported in India for use in industries like Chlor-alkali, dental amalgam, batteries, clinical thermometers, barometers, pesticides and drugs, electrical and electronic appliances etc. The total import of mercury in 2002-03 is 531.20 Metric tonnes.

(d) & (e) : Yes, Sir. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has expressed concern over India becoming a major consumer of mercury and other related issues.

(f) : The potentail toxicity of mercury for human varies widely depending on the chemical form, the pathways of exposure, the amount and vulnerability of the person exposed.

(g) & (h) : Various legislative measures and initiatives have been taken to deal with mercury pollution problems. These include the following:

- Import of mercury bearing waste has been totally banned under the Hazardous Wastes (management & Handling) Rules,2003.

- Stringent effluent and emissions standards have been notified under Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 withrespect to concentration of mercury for Mercury-Cell Process based Chlor-alkali industries.

- Comprehensive guidelines have been prepared and issued by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) foreffluent treatment from Chlor-alkali industry.

- No new plant and/or expansion of mercury-cell processed based Chlor-alkali plants have been granted environmental clearance since 1994 under the provisions of EIA Notification, 1994. As per the available data, mercury cell based plant capacity in India is

currently at 29%.

- Generators of mercury bearing wastes are covered under the Hazardous Wastes (management & Handling) Rules, 1989/2003 requiring Authorization from State Pollution Control Boards.

- Identified hazardous mercury compounds including Mercuric chloride and Mercury methyl chloride have been coveredunder the Manufacture Storage, Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules, 1989 necessitating safe handling procedure.

- A Charter on Corporate Responsibility for Environment Protection (CREP) for Chlor-alkali industry sector hasbeen formulated, under which a number of action plans including switch-over to membrane cell technology and reduction of mercury comsumption at <50 gm/t of production have been initiated.